

**Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself
(and others)?**



St. Michael Church
Newark, NY
Fr. Jeffrey S. Tunnichiff
October 3, 2018

**Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself
(and others)?**



Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Why we might NOT want to forgive others

- We think the perpetrator
 - Needs to make amends FIRST
 - Admit how they have hurt us (are we seeking vindication)
 - And then they must ask for forgiveness
- We think forgiving means
 - Forgetting
 - Making ourselves vulnerable
 - To being victimized again
 - To be **hurt** again

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Spiritual Work of Mercy #3

Admonish the sinner

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



“In order to ease the pain of their self-criticism, some people become more judgmental toward others than they are toward themselves, and the cycle of blaming and shaming continues.”
(Howe, *Guilt*, 26).

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Matthew 7:1-5

“Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you. *Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?* How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove that splinter from your eye,’ while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother’s eye.”

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Admonish

- “In this sense, then, it should be noted that correction should be made not as a judgment, but as a service of truth and love, since it addresses the sinner not as an enemy but as a brother (see 2 Thes 3:15). It can thus result in leading a brother who was becoming lost back to life (Jas 5:19)” (*Corporal and Spiritual Works*, 53).

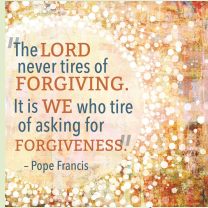
Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



More on Admonish

- “Fraternal correction requires discernment in order to choose the right moment; to correct so as to increase and not decrease a brother’s self-esteem; to exercise it only in truly essential things; to strive to make free rather than to judge and condemn; to correct knowing that you are a sinner and in need of correction” (*Corporal and Spiritual Works*, 54).

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Why we might think God (or others) will NOT forgive us

- We keep doing the same things over and over - not seven times but 77 times (Matthew 18:21-22)
- Not worthy (scrupulous)
- Our own worst enemy
 - It can be easier to forgive others than to forgive ourselves
 - Others see the external good from us, we know the internal bad thoughts

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Why we might NOT want to forgive others (or for us to be forgiven)

- We think the perpetrator
 - *needs to make amends FIRST*
 - *Admit how they have hurt us* (are we seeking vindication)
 - *And then they must ask for forgiveness*
- We think forgiving means
 - *Forgetting*
 - *Making ourselves vulnerable*
 - *To being victimized again*
 - *To be hurt again*

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



“God is a Father
who forgives. His
mercy is greater
than our sin.”
—Mother Teresa

Why (we think) God might choose not to forgive us?

- Old Testament - punishing God - an eye for an eye (actually this was meant to limit severity of punishment, not increase
 - Yet how many times does God rescue his people in OT
- Angry Jesus
- Unforgivable sin – Matthew 12:32

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



“God is a Father
who forgives. His
mercy is greater
than our sin.”
—Mother Teresa

Why (we think) God might choose not to forgive us (cont'd)?

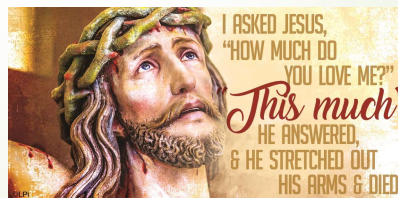
- We know we struggle and/or refuse to forgive others so we assume God is like us and doesn't want to forgive us. The good news is that God is not like us!
- Instead of looking at an angry Jesus, look at a crucifix and see love

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



“But God proves his love for us in that **while we were still sinners** Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:8



Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



even ON THE CROSS Jesus said,

“*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.*” Luke 23:34



Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



“Anger helps no one and simply makes the bearer of the anger feel worse” quoted from a father of one of the slain girls” (*Amish Grace*, 129).

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that prisoner was you.” – Lewis B. Smedes”

Berg, *Hurting in the Church*, 114.

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Forgetting

We would like them to forget what we did but we remember what they did.



Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



God has an easier time (based on his love) forgiving us than we have forgiving ourselves

- **Forgiveness is a gift we don't merit** - that's what makes it a gift, a gift to the assailant **and to the victim**
- Forgiveness is our request to God. It is God's choice to forgive, and He always does if we repent with a contrite heart

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



What Forgiveness is Not?

“Forgiveness advocates has developed a long list of things that forgiveness is not: it is not pretending that a wrong did not occur, it is not forgetting that it happened, and it is not condoning or excusing it. To the contrary, “forgiveness means admitting that what was done was wrong and should not be repeated.” Similarly, forgiveness is not the same thing as *pardon*. In other words, granting forgiveness does not mean that the wrongdoer is now free from suffering the disciplinary consequences of his or her actions.” (*Amish Grace*, 127).

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Guilt!

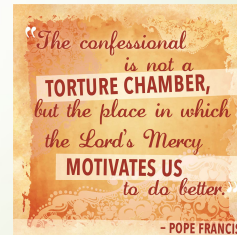
- If we feel like we can't be forgiven, it means we acknowledge we have done something wrong but do we really know what it is and why it's wrong?
- We need to be able to name our sin before we can let go

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



“He uses a marvelous term: *“our God-given capacity to feel guilt.”* Guilt is not our enemy, not if we recognize it for what it is and learn how to profit from its ministry to us. Guilt is the voice that pleads with us to face ourselves honestly, then to make right whatever wrongs we have done to others.”

Howe, *Guilt*, 13.



Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Quoting from St. Bernard of Clairvaux, “You will never have real mercy for the failings of another until you know and realize that you have the same failings in your soul.” (Sri, *Who am I to Judge?*, 150).

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



“One way to examine our true motives is to ask ourselves this question: Am I thermometer or a thermostat in these relationships? A *thermometer* conforms to the environment around it. If it’s hot in the room, the thermometer registers a higher temperature, and if it’s cold the thermometer reading goes down. A *thermostat*, however, is not passive. It influences the world around it. It brings the temperature in the room to the appropriate level.” (Sri, *Who am I to Judge?*, 158).

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



“Sometimes the insight God gives us about our own personal history, and our hurts, is not so much an illumination or understanding that helps us make sense of it all, but rather the serenity *to stop trying to make sense of it all*. It’s the gift of surrendering it all to Jesus, bringing our wounds to his, allowing him to touch them, and discovering that Jesus is all we need.” (Berg, *Hurting in the Church*, 134-5)



Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



In John 8:11, Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery,

“Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more.”

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



If we forgive, do we have to reconcile?

- “The final misunderstanding of forgiveness to be identified in this chapter is one mentioned earlier in another context. It rests upon confusing a decision to forgive people with a willingness to become reconciled with them.” (Howe, *Guilt*, 96).
- Sometimes we realize we are just different people and choose to not continue as friends
- forgiving ourselves and reconciling to ourselves

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



What if the person

- Doesn't admit to any wrong doing?
- Doesn't want to accept forgiveness or reconciliation?

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?

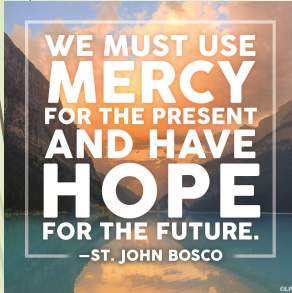


Why must we forgive?

From Night Prayer on Wednesday – Ephesians 4:26-27

“If you are angry, let it be without sin. The sun must not go down on your wrath; do not give the devil a chance to work on you.”

Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Summary

- Why must I be the one to forgive first?
- How many times must we forgive?
- What does holding a grudge do to us?
- Protecting ourselves from future hurt also can limit our chances to feel loved

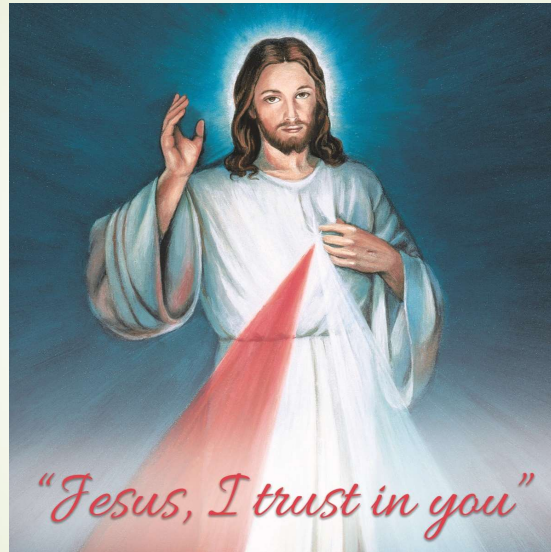
Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Next session

Advent: Preparing for the Incarnation

Wednesday, November 28th at 7:00 p.m.



Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?




Resources

Berg, Rev. Thomas, *Hurting in the Church: A Way Forward for Wounded Catholics*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor. 2017.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Second Edition. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997.

Howe, Leroy T., *Guilt: Helping God's People Find Healing and Forgiveness*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 2003.

Kraybill, Donald B., Steven M. Nolt, David L. Weaver-Zercher. *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy*. Jossey-Bass (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.) 2007.



Why Is It So Hard to Forgive Myself (and others)?



Resources cont'd

Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015.

St. Joseph Edition of The New American Bible Revised Edition. New Jersey, Catholic Book Publishing Corp. 2010.

Sri, Edward, *Who am I to Judge: Responding to Relativism With Logic and Love*. San Francisco, Ignatius Press. 2016.